

# Commentary

THE BUFFIN FOUNDATION

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

## United Nations post-2015 Development Agenda Update

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were in effect until 2015 when they were superseded by a revised and expanded set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that provide a framework for the UN post-2015 Development Agenda. Together, the MDGs and the SDGs constitute a thirty-year plan to change the world in important and fundamental ways with respect to social and economic development. This UN long-range plan applies Management by Objectives (MBO) in goal-setting for worldwide social priorities and contemporary issues of concern. The MBO strategies for the SDGs delineate various specific metrics that define the objectives to be achieved by 2030 for making progress towards goals for poverty, hunger, disease, education, inequality and environmental degradation. The SDGs embrace the concept of achieving human wellbeing on a global scale through a combination of economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

While extreme poverty has eased considerably since 1990, pockets of the worst forms of poverty persist. Ending poverty requires universal social protection systems aimed at safeguarding all individuals throughout the life cycle. It also requires targeted measures to reduce vulnerability to disasters to address specific underserved geographic areas within each country. After a prolonged decline, world hunger appears to be on the rise again. Conflict, drought and disasters linked to climate change are among the key factors causing this reversal in progress. Many more people today are living healthier lives than in the past decade. Nevertheless, people are still suffering needlessly from preventable diseases. Overcoming disease and ill-health will require concerted and sustained efforts, focusing on population groups and regions that have been neglected. More than half of children worldwide are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics. Refocused efforts are

needed to improve the quality of education. Disparities in education along the lines of gender, urban-rural location and other dimensions still run deep, and more investments in education infrastructure are required, particularly in less-developed countries (LDCs). While some forms of discrimination against women and girls are diminishing, gender inequality continues to hold women back and deprives them of basic rights and opportunities. Empowering women requires addressing structural issues such as unfair social norms and attitudes as well as developing progressive legal frameworks that promote gender equality. Many people lack access to safely-managed water supplies and sanitation facilities. Water scarcity, flooding and lack of proper wastewater management also hinder social and economic development. Increasing water efficiency and improving water management are critical to balancing the competing and growing water demands from various sectors and users. Ensuring access to affordable, reliable and modern energy for all has come one step closer due to recent progress in electrification and improvements in industrial energy efficiency. However, national priorities and policies need to be strengthened to put the world on track to meet the energy targets for 2030. Globally, labor productivity has increased and the unemployment rate has decreased. However, more progress is needed to increase employment opportunities, especially for young people, reduce informal employment and labor market inequality, promote safe and secure working environments, and improve access to financial services to ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth. Steady progress has been made to achieve inclusive and sustainable industrialization, but competitive economic forces need to generate employment and income, facilitate international trade and enable the efficient use of resources. Efforts have been made in some countries to reduce income inequality, and to increase zero-tariff access for exports from LDCs and developing coun-

tries. However, progress will need to accelerate to reduce growing disparities within and among countries. Many cities around the world are facing challenges in managing rapid urbanization: ensuring adequate housing and infrastructure to support growing populations; confronting the environmental impact of urban sprawl; and reducing vulnerability to disasters. Decoupling economic growth from resource use is a critical and complex challenge facing humanity today. Doing so effectively will require policies that create an environment for change, develop social and physical infrastructure, and transform business practices along global value chains. The year 2017 was one of the three warmest on record. The world continues to experience rising sea levels, extreme weather conditions and increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases. Urgent and accelerated action is essential for countries to implement commitments to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Advancing the sustainable use and conservation of the oceans continues to require effective strategies and management to combat the adverse effects of overfishing, growing ocean acidification and worsening coastal conditions. Expansion of protected areas for marine biodiversity, and increasing research capacity for ocean science, are important factors to preserve marine resources. Protection of forest and terrestrial ecosystems is increasing, and forest loss has slowed. However, other facets of terrestrial conservation continue to demand accelerated action to protect biodiversity, land productivity and genetic resources, and to curtail the loss of species.

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